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THE PRONUNCIATION OF URDU AND HINDI

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IT is difficult to write correctly about the grammar of a language; it is almost impossible to be accurate about its pronunciation. It follows that the weakest and most unsatisfactory part of books on a language is nearly always that which deals with sounds. The reasons are various. I give some of them here with special reference to Urdu and Hindi.

(1) The tradition is bad. Mistakes were made in the early days of study. One writer after another has copied these mistakes, introducing variations of his own with chaotic results. The statements made by Forbes, who, I believe, was never in India, are still the basis of remarks on Urdu pronunciation.

(2) It is said that every man who has made some progress in the study of a language regards himself as an expert. This may be an exaggeration as regards idiom and syntax, but it is almost literally true of sounds. It is impossible to persuade a man who has made a scholarly study of a spoken tongue in the country where it is spoken that, however much he may know of its grammar and literature, his ear is incapable of hearing its distinctive sounds and that in describing them he is merely guessing (or copying other writers). Yet it is nearly always true. The scholar is perhaps more readily misled than others, for knowing the principal things that he *ought* to hear, he easily persuades himself that he *does* hear them.

(3) It is not possible to write accurately about the sounds of any language without devoting years to the study of phonetics. Most writers have not done this.

(4) This fact leads to another, viz. that Indian speakers are unsafe guides unless they are competent phoneticians. This requires emphasis. Someone will say—surely they know how to pronounce their language. The answer is a simple negative. They may pronounce correctly, but they do not *know* the pronunciation. Englishmen of the richest scholarship in their own tongue will make ludicrous misstatements about its pronunciation if they have not gone far in the study of phonetics. So it is with Indians. This explains the otherwise

remarkable fact that the description of sounds given in grammars written by Indians is often more inaccurate than that of Europeans.

(5) Another source of error to which Indians are liable is the desire to pronounce according to preconceived notions as to how words *ought* to be pronounced. Thus a Malayali will import what he thinks are correct (Arabic) sounds into Urdu words. He will discourse on the *hamza*, or *ʾaḥ*, will assure the unfortunate student that words written *ḥuḍn*, *ḥīr*, *ṣūḥ*, are monosyllables, that *jidd o jidd* should be pronounced *jidd o jidd*, that *fiʾ* is different from *fel*, that the first syllable of *maḥḍi* is not the same as that of *maḥḥil*. Pandits have not the same opportunities in Urdu, for the pronunciation of Sanskrit words in that language has been fixed without consulting them, but in the cognate language Hindi they try to force old forms upon an unwilling people, and teach them to students. It is greatly to be regretted that some Europeans are as guilty as these Pandits, for instead of the correct words used by the people in conversation, they write incorrect forms assimilated to Sanskrit.

The following remarks deal with the pronunciation of educated Delhi men. It is generally known that Delhi and Lachnow, and these places alone, are recognized as *maḥmad* or authoritative in all matters of Urdu idiom and pronunciation. When the two cities differ, as they do in a few unimportant points, both are considered correct. I have never met an Indian who questioned their pre-eminence. When one has to choose a form of the language for public purposes it is better to take the Delhi idiom, for it is nearer the centre of the Urdu speaking world. The normal language employed in lectures and speeches before large audiences from Peshawar to Bihar is Urdu, and while Delhi is situated close to the centre of this tract of country, Lachnow is on its eastern border. The revisers of the Urdu New Testament were wisely guided in their decision to make Delhi Urdu their standard. But let me say again that the differences are slight. When I speak of the pronunciation of English I mean English as spoken by an average public school man. (See Professor Jones's *Dictionary*.)

I desire here not to discuss in exhaustive detail the question of Urdu pronunciation, but to go briefly into the various sounds, and give such hints as may be useful to students. When necessary I have added in square brackets the phonetic equivalents.

At the end of the article will be found a special note on Hindi pronunciation.

COMMON MISTAKES

As I write I have no grammars before me, and I have not in mind the words of any writer, European or Indian, but I think that all the following mistakes may be found in books of comparatively recent date.

Hamza.—Directions are often given for enunciating *hamza*, but they are ill-founded, for it is a mere device of writing, disregarded more often than not, even in writing, and wholly ignored in pronunciation. In Urdu *hamza* is never pronounced.

Long Vowels.—So-called long vowels are a frequent source of error. Books speak of "long *a*", "long *i*", "long *u*", and tell us that *e* and *o* are always long. The fact is that long vowels of any kind are infrequent in Urdu. Words like *ḥarīrī*, *ṣaḥīfī*, *ḥud-shudhī*, are said to contain three long vowels. Actually they contain four short vowels. There is not a long vowel in any of them. Under strong stress vowels are sometimes lengthened, thus we may hear *maḥāḥād* meeting. *ḥudhūd* reasons, with the last vowel long (but the middle vowel undubitably short); again *ḥakḥ* hark, sounding by itself as a long *e*, but the *e* in *ḥakḥ* is always short, and yet this short *e* differs considerably from the *e* in the usual English pronunciation "ḥakḥo".

The mistake arises out of the notion that *ī* and *ū* are lengthened forms of *i* and *u*, and that Urdu *e* and *o* are long varieties of the English vowels in "pet" and "bot". The difference is not one of length: in each case the vowels are different. The phrases *maḥḥaḥ be me ḥakḥe* and *ḥam ghayrō ḥo ḥakḥo* contain seven short *e*'s and seven short *o*'s respectively. To determine the length of a vowel we must listen to complete breath groups in conversation, not to isolated words. Any vowel which takes a markedly longer time to utter than its fellows we may consider long.

au (often written *au*): this is described as the same as or very like the vowel in "how" or "proud", so that the first syllable of *ḥauḥ*, the sound *ḥauḥ*, would be practically the English "howl". The sound *ḥauḥ*, terrible, would be quite different. It is often a single half-long vowel, very is, however, quite different. It is often a single half-long vowel, very similar to the *au* in "hand" [ɔ:], but sometimes it is a diphthong of which the first part is the vowel just mentioned and the second a monophthongic *o* [ɔ]. Cf. *Maulā*, God, generally *maḥḥa*, occasionally *maḥḥa*; *ḥauḥa*, repentance (ḥaḥḥa or *ḥauḥa*).

ay (or *ai*) is the front vowel corresponding to the back vowel *au*, not resembling the English *i* in "high", "style", with which it is compared, but closely approximating to *a* in "hand", "bad".

Like *u*, it is frequently, perhaps ordinarily, a single vowel. Thus the two words *hai to* (is indeed) sound to the average Englishman's ear not like "high toe", but exactly like " (Bishop) Hatto", and the word *'agn*, exact, is to him indistinguishable from "Anne". The Urdu vowel is generally half long. Not infrequently it is a diphthong composed of the *a* in "Anne" followed by the *e* in "get". These are the nearest possible English equivalents. Phonetic symbols [ʰæ to] or [ʰæe to], and [æ n] or [æ n]. (Y. also *myāda*, horn [pæ-*da*] or [pæ-*da*]; *dhālī*, bag [tʰæ-*li* or tʰæ-*li*].

Cerebral letters: *ṭ, ḍ, ṛ* are often said to be like English *l, d, r*, only more vigorously enunciated, and they are called "hard" *ṭ, ḍ*, and *ṛ*. There is nothing vigorous in their utterance, and it would be just as correct to call them "soft" *ṭ, ḍ*, and *ṛ*. They are neither harder nor softer than the corresponding front letters *ṭ, ḍ, ṛ*. Cerebral or retroflex *ṭ* and *ḍ* are made like English *l* and *d*, but the point of contact is about 3 in. from the upper teeth. I am conscious, however, that as no one can measure this distance in his mouth, the direction will not be of practical value. It will be better to say "far back on the hard palate". Note that *ṛ* is very unlike the two American fricative *r*'s. English *l* and *d* do not occur in Urdu. The point of contact for *ṭ* and *ḍ* is considerably further back than for the English letters; for Urdu *ṭ* and *ḍ* the tip of the tongue is further forward than for English *l* and *d*, and the position of the rest of the tongue is of importance. See below under *ṭ* and *ḍ*. To make *ṛ* the tongue is turned back slightly further than for *ṭ* and *ḍ*, and then brought forward with a flap, the under surface of the front of the tongue striking the roof of the mouth further forward than the point of contact for *ṭ* and *ḍ*. It is essential to *begin* far back; otherwise the acoustic effect will be wrong.

ṭ and *ḍ* are common in Urdu, but they are found only before *ṭ* and *ḍ*, and people imagine they are pronouncing ordinary *l* and *n*. If the *ṭ* and *ḍ* are correctly pronounced, the *ṭ* and *ḍ* will automatically come right. The most important point to remember about retroflex letters is that they have no effect whatever upon neighbouring vowels. Englishmen almost invariably allow them to influence the preceding and succeeding vowels. In the case of *ṭ* care is necessary to avoid the aspiration that accompanies English *l*.

ṛ is generally described vaguely as being between English *e* and *æ*. Sometimes it is said to be bilabial, i.e. made with both lips. In reality, however, the upper lip is not used in producing it. There is slight contact of the upper teeth with some part, it hardly matters

which, of the lower lip. Air may or may not escape at the sides of the point of contact, and there may or may not be audible friction. When the sound is doubled the friction is always audible. One would not be far wrong in saying that *ṛ* is a very faint English *r*, but the acoustic effect is so different that an Urdu *ṛ* in an English word like "very" strikes an Englishman at once as wrong, and Urdu speakers find it almost impossible to distinguish between the three English words "wall", "whale", and "veil". Symbol [v].

ṣ is the corresponding *surd*.

'ain: few grammars attempt to tell how *'ain* is pronounced. Usually one is told that the pronunciation is very difficult and can only be learnt from an Indian. But a considerable majority of Urdu speakers never pronounce *'ain* at all, and the entire ignoring of it would cause no comment. It is far better to omit it than make an obvious effort to say it. In educated Delhi pronunciation *'ain* is generally omitted, but is pronounced in the following case.

A stressed *ā* or *ā* followed or preceded by *'ain* is pronounced with slight, but noticeable, pharyngeal tension; or putting it in every-day words one might say "with slight contraction of throat muscles". It should be noted that the *'ain* is not a consonant at all, it is mere muscular tension which lasts throughout the vowel. Vowels other than *ā* and *ā* are not affected in this way.

Accented *ā, ī, and e*, followed by an *'ain* which is either (1) final or (2) followed by a consonant, are pronounced *ā, ī, and e* respectively, but the *'ain* itself is not pronounced except as just mentioned. *ḥād*, after, becomes *ḥād* [hād]; *mīda*, stomach, becomes *mīda* [mīda]; *shūda*, flame, becomes *shūda* [shūda].

SOUNDS PRACTICALLY THE SAME AS IN ENGLISH

Promising that in English voiceless plosives generally receive clearly marked aspiration which must be avoided in unaspirated Urdu plosives, we may say that the following differ only very slightly from the corresponding sounds in English.

p, b, k, g, m, n, ṇ, s, z, ḥ, y (phonetic symbols *p, b, k, g, m, n, ṇ, s, z, ḥ, y*). *ṭ* may be added to the list provided that we understand only English clear *l*, as in "feeling", and not the dark *l* as in "feel". *ṛ* is always followed by *g* or *k*, but it is not true that *n* followed by *g* or *k* becomes *ṛ*. The four *z*'s—*z, z, z, z*—are identical. Similarly the three *s*'s—*s, s, s*—are the same.

SOUNDS CLOSELY RESEMBLING ENGLISH SOUNDS

ch, j, sh, zh. All these are pronounced with the tip and blade of the tongue further forward than in English, and *ch* must be as nearly as possible unaspirated. The best phonetic symbols for *ch* and *j* are *c* and *ɟ*, as it is not open to us to employ the misleading double signs which are found in some books. The symbols will then be (*c, ɟ, ʃ, ʒ*). These four sounds are produced with unrounded (i.e. not protruded) lips. The English sounds are generally made with rounded or protruded lips.

THE REMAINING CONSONANTS

l, d are the Italian sounds, uttered with the whole tongue raised so that the surface is against the palate, and the sides against all the upper teeth. Students are often instructed to make these sounds by putting the tip of the tongue against the front teeth. This will result in a noticeably wrong sound unless the surface and sides of the tongue are in the right place. *t* and *ʃ* are the same.

q is a *k* with the point of contact further back than the uvula. Unlike the corresponding Arabic sound it is completely unaspirated; in Arabic there is generally slight aspiration. *q* has no voiced equivalent.

r is made with a single tap of the tip of the tongue against the upper teeth ridge. It is almost the same as the so-called trilled *r* in Scotland, but it should be remembered that many Scotch people do not use it. In some Urdu words it is found double. It is then trilled. Such words are chiefly Arabic, some are Persian, a few are Hindi. The southern English *r* is quite different. Many English speakers who think they can say Urdu *r*, spoil it by the insertion of a neutral vowel. Thus for *fir*, *aur*, *dūr* [*fɪr*, *ɔr*, *duːr*] they say [*faiːr*, *ɔar*, *duːar*].

When *r* is followed by *y* it is sometimes pronounced as an advanced fricative, thus for *rayna* (*فرینا*) we may hear (*farana*). It is dangerous to imitate this.

kh and *gh* are not unlike the German sounds in “ach” and “waggen” (except when this “g” is a simple *g*), but they are further back. The Scotch “ach” heard in “Buchalls”, “Buchan”, is like *kh*, but is further forward. The Urdu sounds, though far back, are gently enunciated, and are never trilled. In this they differ from Parisian voiced and unvoiced *r*. Symbols [*ʁ*, *ʁ̥*].

h is as in English, both voiced and unvoiced, but the *sonant*

variety is much commoner than in English. An *h* which follows a vowel and closes a syllable is often sonant, and one which comes between two voiced sounds nearly always so, i.e. the vocal chords vibrate while it is being uttered. The difficulty of Urdu *h* lies partly in its strongly vibrant quality (when sonant), and partly in its occurring in positions in which English *h* does not occur. The latter is nearly always found before an accented vowel, whereas in Urdu it is commonly joined to the plosive consonants, including *ch* and *ʒ*, but excluding *q*, also to *r* and *ʃ*; it often ends syllables, and is frequent before unaccented vowels. Unlike English *h* it is never pronounced with the German “ich-laut”. The two letters *h* and *h̄* are identical. Symbols: sonant [ʁ], surd [h̄].—*ve*.

The question of the influence of *h* or *h̄* upon preceding vowels is very complicated, but one or two rules may be given here.

When accented *a*, *i*, or *u* is followed by an *h* or *h̄* which is either (1) final or (2) followed by a consonant, the vowel is pronounced *ai*, *ci*, or *o* respectively.

If the *h* or *h̄* is followed by *a*, *e*, or *i*, the accented *a* which precedes becomes a short *ai*.

Similarly if the letter following *h* or *h̄* is *ā*, the *a* becomes *ā*, but if the letter following *h* or *h̄* is *u*, the *a* becomes a short *au*.

If the letter following the *h* is *i*, *o*, *ā* the preceding *a* is not affected. *ih̄* and *uh̄* occur seldom except in the circumstances mentioned above, and the words are generally uncommon words with the pronunciation not quite uniform. It would not be worth while attempting to give detailed rules.

The subjoined examples will illustrate the rules: *bahin*, sister [*bæɦin*]; *kahnā*, say [*kæɦnā*]; *kahā*, said [*kæɦā*]; *kahē* [*kæɦē*]; *kahī* [*kæɦī*]; *bahul*, much [*bæɦul*]; *pahunchā*, arrive [*pæɦunchā*]; *bahū*, daughter-in-law [*bæɦū*]; *ruh*, that [*ræɦ*]; *gh*, this [*ʒeh*]; *Dilli*, Delhi [*dæɦli*]; *muhkam*, firm, etc. [*mæɦkam*].

VOWELS

The vowels in general are formed with the lips more widely spread than in English.

i, high front, like Italian *i*, higher than English *i* in “marine”.

[*i*] *i*, not unlike English *i* in “fin”. [*i*].

e, pure monophthongic vowel, higher than English *e* in “get”, lower than the vowel often heard in Scotch “take”, and not so tense.

a little lower than cardinal *e* [e]. Whether short, half-long, or long, it is the same vowel.

ay or *ai*, described above; higher than English *a* in "hand" [æ or æi]. See also diphthongs.

a, like *u* in English "hun", lips more spread [ʌ].

ā, not unlike *a* in "calm", but further forward [ɑ].

au or *ou*, described above; [ɔ or ɔɔ]. See also diphthongs.

o, pure monophthong; not unlike vowel often heard in Scotch "no", but slightly lower; lower also than cardinal *o* [o].

Diphthongs.

ai (i:) : rarely heard as [ai], e.g. *gei* [gɛi], she went.

au or *ou* (sometimes) [ɔɔ]; see above.

ay or *ai* (sometimes) [æi]; see above.

u resembles the *u* in "pull" [ʊ].

ī is like Italian *u*, French *ou* [u].

Nasal Vowels.—All vowels may be nasalized. This nasalization is often described as "nasal *a*", which suggests that the writers believe there are some *ā*'s which are not nasal.

Tones.—There are no tones in Urdu such as we get in Punjabi or Burmese.

Accent.—The only rule of practical value seems to me to be the following. I am speaking, of course, of the natural accent of conversation, not the artificial accent of poetry.

What is generally understood by "inflection" never causes the shifting of an accent from one syllable to another. Therefore:—

(i) If we know upon what vowel the accent in one part of a verb falls, we know how to stress the whole verb, e.g. *jabunchūā*, arrive, has the accent on first syllable. Consequently *jabunch*, *jabunchke*, *jabunchīgē*, *jabunchīgā*, *jabunchucūā*, *jabunchucūā* all have the accent on the first syllable. *jabunchūā*, cause to arrive, has the accent on the third syllable and all other parts of the verb will have it there also.

(ii) The same holds of nouns, adjectives, and pronouns: *rofi*, loaf; *rofiā*, *rofiō* (*rofiyā*, *rofiyō*); all accent on the first syllable.

Exception: some dissyllabic nouns ending in *-ā*, which have in the first syllable an accented *a*, *i*, or *u*, followed by a single consonant, tend in the plural inflected parts to throw the accent on to the *-ā*: *khā* 'lā, sip, *khāṭ* 'e; *ghā* 'fā, cloud, *ghāṭ* 'ō.

HINDI

The word Hindi bears many senses. It may be made to include languages like Avadhi, Rājasthānī, Braj, and Bihārī; it may be confined to "High Hindi" as found in the Hindi Bible and countless modern prose works. If we take it in the latter sense, the only practical one for our purpose, we are at once confronted with the difficulty of deciding how many people (some would add "if any") speak this form of Hindi in their homes, and where they live? If we pass on from that question and try to describe the pronunciation of this Hindi as read aloud from books written in prose, we still have to ask "read by whom? in what part of India?" To give any kind of satisfactory account of the pronunciation we must confine ourselves to the tract extending from Delhi and Saharānpur to Allahābad and Benares.

With this limitation we may say that the description of Urdu sounds given above will be correct for Hindi anywhere near Delhi. (Urdu *kh*, *gh*, *ẓ*, *ẓh*, *q*, 'ain are not supposed to be found in *pheli* or real Hindi. Some of these sounds may occasionally be heard.) As we go further east and south we notice certain changes, but the great majority of sounds remain unaltered.

Consonantal changes: *ʿ* tends towards English *n*, and there is a greater tendency to confuse *b* with *t*, and *j* with *n*.

Vowel changes: tendency to confuse *ī* with *ī* and *u* with *ā*. *ai* becomes more like *ā* or even *ā*, and *au* more like *ā* or *ā*.

Apart from these few points all that is said of Urdu pronunciation will apply to Hindi.

Of the special Hindi letters it should be noted that no distinction is made between the so-called *ri*-vowel and *ri*, between *ś* and *s*, or between *y* and *n*. This applies to the whole area.